



# PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS OF MOUNT DORA LOCAL #3088

P. O. BOX 286 MOUNT DORA, FL 32756

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October 8, 2022

To Our Mount Dora City Council,

We are reaching out directly to you in desperate need to communicate important information that a well-informed council should consider prior to voting on proposals pertaining to the consolidation of the Mount Dora Fire Department. Secondly, we would like to make you aware of notable concerns regarding the current city manager's management styles and decision making.

First and foremost, it is evident that the city manager's justifications for a proposed consolidation are without sound reason and logic. They are based on misinformation and fail to address deliberate evidenced-based factors that were considered in such decisions by former Councils and City leadership. He has blatantly ignored the recommendations of subject matter experts, consultants, national standards, and even his own Fire Chief. The operations of rural and volunteer departments are in stark contrast to standard operations here in Florida. This creates a high index of suspicion that the City Manager is making determinations based on his opinions and prior experiences in a smaller city government and has little to no understanding of the things he is suggesting. This puts citizens at risk of falling victim to poor decisions made by a City Council that was misinformed by a questionably competent City Manager that expressly ignores rational explanations from experts in their corresponding field. It also exposes the City to undue risk, scrutiny, and long-lasting consequences from a decision made in haste.

Please consider the following information pertaining to each proposal point in the City Manager's Council Work Session Memorandum:

## Point 1- Service Delivery

- A. Placing a fire station on the border of a service area is not uncommon as station locations are often determined based on available sites and affordable land. With the density of residential areas in the west region of our city and the sporadic peppering of unincorporated areas throughout that region, it is obvious that there are limited options for a perfectly centered mileage-based radius location for a second station. Note that Tavares station 29 is on the outskirts of their city and borders Howey in the Hills. Eustis station 23 is on the far north side of their city, bordering Umatilla. While their locations were determined based on availability of property, the city of Mount Dora took initiative in paying for and performing a data analysis to determine a more appropriate location for a new station 35 in 2018. The new location is intentionally further into the city limits

therefore the current call distribution may not accurately reflect that of the new station that is more strategically located.

Additionally, the high number of unincorporated residences in the West side of town scattered throughout the city boundaries greatly contribute to the disparity as residents and non-residents are frequently across the street from one another. The nature of the design of the West side of town should not leave tax-paying residents abandoned because our City Manager does not believe in serving their neighbors. While the disproportionate contribution to the closest unit response agreement is likely largely in part due ease of access to main throughfares like 19A/441 and a high number of unincorporated residences, Lake County Fire Rescue also responds to roughly 50% of calls outside of their jurisdiction, including first due response to the incorporated Lakes of Mount Dora, Loch Leven, and often Waterman Village.

Mount Dora lacks resources to respond to a large-scale emergency without the reliance of county resources. Ironically, though resistant to send Mount Dora units to unincorporated areas, the City Manager's opposition to staffing Battalion Chiefs thereby forces us to be reliant on Lake County and Tavares for Command functions in large-scale emergencies. We are also dependent on Lake County Engine 27 to obtain ISO credit for staffing and deployment. Allowing these resources to serve our citizens while staunchly criticizing our contribution to a shared resource agreement seems hypocritical at best. The closest unit agreement gets a unit on scene of an emergency as quickly as possible. The citizens do not seem to be the ones who have a problem with closest unit response. That complaint, interestingly, rings loudest from the City Manager and IT Director.

- B. "Enhanced Response time for Structure Fires" as a claim based exclusively on a 3-mile radius from a point is completely neglecting to consider ACTUAL factors to response time. Units are dispatched based on "closest unit" with consideration of the nearest accessible roads and their speed limits. Stop signs, speed bumps, traffic lights, traffic, school zones, etc. A variety of factors contribute to actual response time. While a circle may "mathematically" represent a response area, it is terribly concerning that a City Manager would not consider actual factors and concerns expressed by an expert in the field but rather assume that their opinions are more correct than that of someone with practical and applied knowledge and experience.

A simple GPS inquiry demonstrates that travel time to the Eudora Road corridor increases from 2-4 minutes from both old and new Station 35 to over 8 minutes from Station 34. Enhanced response times ONLY refer to proximity to Downtown and completely neglect response to the West side of town.

- C. While the City Manager favors outdated practices of management being performed exclusively in person and on paper as opposed to embracing modern technology and opportunities to operate with a core value of efficiency. The reality stands that training

does NOT in fact need to be done at the same time and at the same site to “achieve the best result.” This is a representation of an uneducated opinion, as the department works diligently to maintain consistency and high standards for training and communication. Digital records for incident documentation, training, staffing, and daily activities provide complete interoperability between stations. Claiming we need to be in one place to operate efficiently disregards the measures put in place by departments around the world that have more than one fire station.

- D. The department presently uses a technology-based scheduling system that allows supervisors to adjust assignments remotely to ensure appropriate staffing at all times, as well as allowing personnel to view their assignment and easily relocate their belongings prior to the start of a shift. This is done intentionally. Staffing units with 3 personnel is established prior to a shift and is by no means arbitrary as it is established as a safety measure based on best practice standards from the NFPA. Describing it as arbitrary is a further demonstration of a lack of knowledge in the field. While NFPA recommendations are often disregarded in small, rural and volunteer based organizations, Mount Dora Fire Department has worked hard to establish operational guidelines and procedures based on safety, efficiency and evidence-based practices.

To even suggest that getting 3 personnel on a truck could be better accomplished by having everyone at one station implies the cross-staffing of a unit. This would require personnel to physically move their gear and equipment from one truck to another prior to responding to a call. NFPA standards for turnout time allow 60 seconds for a medical call and 80 seconds for a fire call. Moving gear between units would add MINUTES to this equation, increasing response times even further. Staffing and deployment models are incredibly nuanced. To reduce this to a game of popcorn where the tones go off and everyone picks a unit to jump on is laughable. The only way to “achieve ratios of 3” is to staff 3 personnel per unit. Otherwise, the unit without 3 goes out of service and is rendered ineffective. It’s robbing Peter to pay Paul.

- E. Keeping “all trucks and personnel closest to the highest risk area” is a danger and an insult to the residents of the West Side of the city. This is like keeping all military bases in the country near the White House because it was determined to be the biggest risk. Having strategically positioned resources is another foundation of public safety and operational readiness that our City Manager does not understand. From a strategic operations standpoint, it makes no sense.
- F. Similarly, the Fire Service, like the military, implements an organized Command structure that has a leader/supervision within each engine/truck company. These supervisors communicate directly with their direct reports, and the organization is able to operate efficiently. Direct supervision is often required only in systems operating under micromanagement and a lack of trust. We are to be trusted to administer life-saving

interventions on a daily basis, yet seemingly cannot be trusted to operate in two separate fire stations.

#### Point 2- Cost Benefit

- A. The newly constructed station is not too large, but rather appropriately sized to replace an undersized dilapidated structure. The new station, (once again) was designed with intention to meet the present and future needs of a growing city and growing department. It was actually downsized from its original design due to rising construction costs and leaves no room for potential growth. The fire department maintains care and use of millions of dollars in apparatus and equipment, including reserve apparatus so that we may continue to operate when a vehicle is out of service for maintenance. Consolidating the two stations would leave us without room to appropriately and safely store the high value resources our citizens have already paid for. A \$450,000 engine purchased less than 5 years ago would be left in the Florida sun while electric trucks rested safely under cover.
- B. The current fitness and sleeping quarters at each station are minimally sufficient and leave something to be desired. Presently with only two units at Station 34, firefighters and EMS sleep in bunk beds and share a gym with the Police Department. The kitchen is barely larger than a residential one, and the breaker trips when 3 appliances are used simultaneously. Adding another 3 personnel per shift to the equation is hardly increasing comfort and efficiency.
- C. Housing the electric company inventory under direct supervision of electric leadership can be accomplished without using a building already designed, hardened, and nearly completed to function as a fire station.
- D. This City obtained 21 million in bonds for 3 fire stations and 13 million in bonds for public works improvements. It is difficult to explain to the citizens how 34 million dollars provided 2 fewer fire stations than promised and an electric department building that cost the price of a fire station.

Interestingly enough, even the City staff do not agree with the City Manager's proposal, as evidenced by the headlines atop Option 4, which staff are stated to unanimously support. The Directors are subject matter experts specifically commissioned to provide a recommendation for the direction of their respective departments, and yet the City Manager continues to disregard the opinions in favor of his own ideas. If an option is agreed upon by all AND is more fiscally responsible than the City Manager's proposal AND provides more resources and infrastructure, why is it being undermined?

It should be clear by now that the Union adamantly opposes the permanent closure of Fire Station 35 and distrusts the intentions of the City Manager. We firmly believe that consolidation into a single fire station will increase response times and do nothing to enhance efficiency.

Furthermore, it is likely to have an adverse and immediate effect on culture, morale, and turnover. Just minutes after the announcement in August of this proposal, firefighters were considering seeking employment elsewhere. The uncertainty and lack of support felt throughout the department is palpable. After 9 firefighters were laid off in 2021, the threat of future staffing reductions sits ever-present in the minds of our personnel. Consolidation opens the door to a host of future threats and insecurities.

We rely on Council to be informed, educated, and to ask good questions. It is our sincere hope that each of you will understand the weight of this decision and perform due diligence prior to a vote that shifts the trajectory of an entire City for decades to come.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Professional Firefighters of Mount Dora  
Local 3088